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POSITIVITY AND NEGATIVITY OF USING TRANSLATION IN ELT SETTINGS

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Abstract:

Translation is a teaching technique in more or less the same weight of the other techniques of language teaching. However, there are some reservations about its use in the target language context. Therefore, the aim of this study is to analyze its positivity and negativity in the context of English language teaching. For that end a qualitative approach will be followed to analyze the related studies and the observations concerning the use of the mother tongue in teaching target languages in the general sense of the term and the teaching of English language in particular as the language with which we concern ourselves in this present study. In the study a discussion of the related literature and the observations regarding practices of mother tongue uses in ELT contexts will be adopted for data collection, analysis and interpretation. As far as translation is still in use as a teaching technique some advantages and drawbacks are expected to be observed due to its extent of use and the whether the contexts of use are appropriate or not. The use of the target language is, however, recommended for more learners communicative functions. Translation may be useful in certain contexts in which no negative mother tongue interference prevails to hinder communicative fluency. Out of the discussion of the related data the main findings of the study will be outlined, and on these findings some recommendations and suggestions will be set up to let discussion, on similar related topics, continue in further future studies in language teaching in general and in ELT in particular.

Key words: Positivity, Negativity, ELT Settings, Juxtaposition, A Quick Shift, Convergence, Divergence, Loan Translation, Concepts, Cognitive Words, Emotive Words, İnterference.

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Introduction

The teaching of a second or a foreign language is a voyage of theorization and experimentation in which concerned scholars always run after better methods for enhancing learners' efforts to learn the concerned target languages. In ELT settings approaches of English language teaching and learning are generally subdivided into the ones which are known as the traditional approaches of language teaching and learning such as the behaviorists' approach which is subdivided into different methods and techniques of language teaching and learning such as the Grammar Translation Method and the Direct Method; and on the other side there are the modern approaches of language teaching and learning which are mainly affected by the ideas of the Mentalist movement headed by the famous American linguist, Noam Chomsky, and these approaches are also subdivided into some methods and techniques of language teaching and learning such as the communicative approach to language teaching and learning.

In spite of the differences between the Behaviorists and the Mentalists' approaches of language teaching andlearning, ELT concerned scholars and practitioners are generally advised to be eclectic in their selection of ELT methodology because each method has its own advantages and shortcomings that we are advised to follow the strong points and to avoid the weaknesses of these methods for fruitful teaching and learning practices. Grammar Translation Method, as one of the components of the traditional ELT methodology is of great relevance to our present study due to its use of translation as a technique in language teaching and learning. Therefore, we need to devote a portion of discussion to this method to show the importance of translation, strengths, and weaknesses of translation in this method.

Grammar Translation Method is one of the methods that drive their conceptions from the Behaviorist Approach to language teaching and learning. It is classified as a classical method for foreign language teaching as it used to be practiced in the teaching of Greek and Latin. To have a general idea about its processing it is better to enlist Prator and Celce – Murcia's (1979: 3) principles of Grammar Translation Method as mentioned by Brown (2000: 15 – 16) first, teaching is processed through the native language with little practices of the target language; second, new lexical items are enlisted in isolated forms; third, more elaborated grammatical rules are given; fourth, the teaching of grammar is to help in putting words together and to focus on the forms and inflection of words; fifth, introducing earlier the reading of classical texts; sixth, no great interest is given to the contents of the texts rather they are mainly used for grammatical practices; seventh, drills are merely translations of disconnected texts from the target to the mother tongue; and eighth, no attention is given to pronunciation. Then Brown (ibid) justifies the popularity of the Grammar Translation Method by saying that it does not need more sophisticated pedagogical or methodological training or complicated marking as it can objectively be scored and marked by the set up drills. Therefore, the central rational of this method is the use of structural units with their translations from the learners' native language. These structural units should be structurally accepted, and there is no great interest in their semantic appropriateness. The learners should memorize their structural units with their translations. The teaching and learning process is a teacher – centred process; that is to say the teacher controls all the process of language teaching and learning, and the learners are just passive recipients of learning. Out of this explanation of the processes of Grammar Translation Method, it is clear that translation plays an essential role in language teaching. The method also has great interest

in the structures more than in the meanings; therefore, some inappropriate structures could be perceived within the text books that follow the Grammar Translation Method such as: "Masood slaughtered the sheep, and the sheep slaughtered Masood." As one of the famous examples in a previous Sudanese syllabuses in the sixties and seventies of the previous century.

Out of the Grammar Translation Method we can say that the use of translation in language teaching can be taken as a continuum on one of its extremes we find those who recommend the use of translation in language teaching, and on the other those who do not recommend the use of translation and instead they prefer the authentic use of the target language due to the differences between the target and the native language. Between these two extremes of the continuum we find those who use translation in language teaching but with some reservations; therefore, if translation is used it should be followed quickly and directly with expressions from the target language, and this is called 'juxtaposition'. Juxtaposition can be a safe escape from the negative transfer that may happen as a result of the shift from the target language to the native language. It can also be considered as a motivating factor because the learners may implicitly try to apply some kinds of comparisons and contrasts between the target and the native language, as it is going to be discussed below.

Under the great pressure and attack against Grammar Translation Method, its popularity has started to be affected as one of the preferred teaching methods, in spite of the fact that it is still in use in a variety of teaching and learning contexts as a preference among some traditional language teachers and their students. Some of the major attacks against the Grammar Translation Method are, according to Johnson and Johnson (1999: 165), the structures used in teaching a target language are devoid from their real life usage or authentic native – like expressions, in addition to the boredom that learners feel out of the translation from the target language into the native language and vice versa. Moreover, the influence of the renewed language methodology will definitely play a great role in this shift from the grammar translation method and the traditional methodology in general to the modern methodology which will be supported with all the encouraging and motivating techniques to be used in the field of language teaching and learning, and, of course, this is a noticeable phenomenon of any new trend or discovery .

The Importance of the Study

This study is Important as it focuses on an important practice in English language teaching methodology, that is translation. There was some kind of confidence in using translation in explaining meanings of new lexicons or even sentences, among some traditional teachers, in spite of the fact that translation in current ELT methodology is not recommended. This very important gap between practices of English language teaching and the current methodology gives this study its importance because the gap between theory and practice is one of the most important reasons for conducting research projects to find out the reasons behind such gaps and how to recommend suggestions for remedial works and how to bridge the gap between theory and practice for better methodological practices and success.

The study is also important as it tries to handle the topic in some kind of integration between the present study and the other previous research projects that tackle the use of translation in English language teaching. Out of the previous studies a solid background will be established and on which discussion will be processed in order to come out with a thorough understanding of the problem and hence better solution for the use of translation. That is to say we believe that translation may be recommended in certain cases of English language teaching methodology, mainly in cases where the

use of translation is a facilitator of raining such as explanations of abstract ideas or names of some materials or objects,but it should not be the most commonly used technique due to the short comings that may result out of its intensive use.

Methodology

The study follows the qualitative content analysis approach over the related literature in its processing, discussion, findings and conclusion. For that end a review, discussion and correlation among the previous related studies will be undergone together with our own observations and experience of English language teaching. In the first part of the study the theoretical background of the study will be outlined to include translation as a theory in language use and teaching. The discussion will also include the role of translation across the different teaching approaches and their methodology so as to make a general background on which we develop a reasonable and a good understanding of translation and its use, and the strengths and weaknesses of its use in ELT.

Procedures

To process this study we need first to introduce the concept of translation in languages teaching, and the teaching of English language as the target language with which we are concerned. This introduction is needed so as to be able to set up the general theoretical framework of this study. The introduction will be some kind of a historical survey over translation and its use in language methodology. After the introduction a survey over the related similar literature will be set up in order to be discussed and correlated in order to be able to set up the discussion out of which the main findings, recommendations and suggestions for future studies will be set up.

The Theoretical Frame Work And Some Related Studies

In this part of the study a general survey and discussion of the related literature will be outlined for further discussion and correlation among these studies. As a first point we start with what Hatim and Munday (2004: 3) say about the definition of translation when they start with some dictionary definitions. Out of these definitions they conclude with that there are two senses of translation the first is the process that the translator does in taking a text from another language as the source language into another language as the target language to which translation is intended to transform this text. The second sense is the product that the translator creates to be used in that target language. However, the sense of taking over a text from a language into another one is not that simple process as a result of the expected differences between the two languages in terms of either comparisons and contrasts, similarities or differences between these languages. Fromkin et al (2011: 312) take an extremist view by saying that when learners find that the absence of a word to a word equivalent may make translation impossible and make even the learning of another language impossible. However, in that case one word translation in the target language can be equated with a series of words to give more or less the meaning of just a single word. The same idea was also mentioned by Opitz (2011: 154) when he mentioned that a difficulty may arise in cases where a learner may not be able to map lexical items to their conceptualization due to the fact that one word in the target language may not have the exact single word equivalent in their first language, or there

may be an absence of one word to one word translation. In such a case the learner may rely on what is called interlingua translation. In more or less the same view of translation Hunston and Oakey (2010: 119) said that it is not likely to be that expressions within two different languages to bear the same semantic imports; linguists try to make it probable for translation to reflect more or less the same shades of meaning of these different languages concepts due to the need for translation as a medium of interaction between two different codes of languages. Therefore, Wardhaugh (2006: 226 – 27) says that 'over – literal translation is dangerous'; he justifies this by saying that what can be said in a language cannot be said in another in terms of grammar or even semantics as far as we consider instances of languages such as the metaphorical expressions. For Sapir (1921: 106) the scientific language is a general form of language that represents symbolic features that are common in all languages because they are drawn from further processes of translations; and in translating a scientific literature one will find him/herself adequately capable of doing that because the original text was also a product of translation. And for Scliar-Cabral (2010: 275) who offers more or less the same picture of translation, in cases of technical terminologies, it might be sufficient to have one word for one word equivalents due to the seemingly homogeneity of terminologies within the same field of specialty.

This point of scientific literature is equivalent to the translations of the abstract units of language that might also descend from a common source. The danger of using literal translation will be elaborated further when we consider in details the continuum of translation and its extremes of acceptance or rejection or even acceptance with some reservations. According to Lyons (1979: 409) there are variety of problems with regard to translation mainly if we ask what meaning a particular lexical item has because this may involve different things including the context in which the question is raised. That is to say in most cases there is no one to one relation between a language and the other languages. For Chomsky (2000: 132) this phenomenon of the absence of one to one relationship among languages is what he calls 'translation indeterminacy'.

As it has been stated above and within the introduction to this study that translation in language teaching in general and in teaching English language in particular could be taken in a continuum in one of its extremes avoidance of the use of translation, and on the other some kind of tolerance to permit the use of translation, and of course between the two extremes there is somewhat preservative perspective whereby translation should be taken cautiously to benefit from its advantages and to avoid its negative influences in the experience of language teaching and learning. Sárosdy et al (2006: 64) express a negative aspect of translation that it is not recommended in language teaching as it lacks communicative activities as the students are just attached to a certain text and that they will never practice any kind of oral activities in dealing with the assigned texts for translation. Jones (2010: 28) states that a mere translation may not reflect the actual intended meaning because the context in which the meaning is expressed helps in its actual interpretation through the interaction that happens at that very real context on the background of other social or historical factors related to that source language. According to Johnson and Johnson (1999: 378) the popularity of using translation in language teaching has started to decline due to the attacks against grammar translation method, and the shift of emphasis from writing to speech. The latter point of the shift to speech serves the goals of the native language speakers to send teachers whatever their teaching experience is to teach English in particular in countries all over the world. However, translation in language teaching has continued to be in use up to now for a variety of reasons that we are going to discuss below.

Two views about the use of translation in second language learning are expressed by Randall (2007: 119/ 165) first he said that at the earlier stages of second language learning the learners may depend on translation from their native language to understand the central message of a written text. Then he stated that the role of translation is lessened as a result of the shift away from the use of grammar translation method mainly in more modern language teaching and learning contexts. Then he mentioned two factors about the inefficiency of using translation in the teaching learning process; the first of which is related to the difficulty encountered in relating L1 and L2 semantic properties of the lexicon, and the second is the lack of quickness in processing the translated word when the learner tries to look up the meaning of the word to be translated in his/her native language. Hence the process of learning will be slowed down.

In another study Ellis et al (2009: 96) said that advanced and elementary second language learners may depend on translation as a strategy to measure their learning advancement. That is to say the mastery of a target language can be reflected in the capacity of translating its structures and lexical items in the learners' first language. According to Johansson (2008: 13) translation is a reflection of somewhat a kind of similarity or differences among languages. This sense of cross – linguistic similarities or differences between the languages may give the learner some kind of motivation to trace these differences or similarities between his/her native language and the target language if the teaching/ learning environment is well designed to encourage such a kind of openness to this experience.

On the part of the directly related previous studies, we find that the majority of these studies follow the same line of the continuum of using translation in teaching languages from those that bear positive attitudes toward the use of translation, and those that bear negative attitudes and the ones with the moderate attitudes toward the use of translation according to certain precautions of use, or the quick shift to the use of the target language 'juxtaposition' so as to superimpose its use. In one of these studies done by Giaber (2014: 27) who started his discussion of the topic by denoting the common observation that the use of translation in language teaching creates both supporters and opponents for this technique of language teaching. This study was conducted in Tripoli and the nearby areas in Libya. The researchers designed a questionnaire to tackle areas related to whether translation is widely used and when and how it is used and opinions about the subjects' views about the general trend about the use of translation. The subjects were teachers at universities, higher institutes and schools. The main findings of the study were: first translation is widely used as a teaching technique among a great number of the Libyan teachers. The teachers use translation either because their students are weak learners or it saves them time because they face problems explaining lessons in the target language. Translation helps students learn new meanings of words, the knowledge of new language components, to check students' understanding, to develop the students' mastery of the target language, and it helps in assessing students' understanding of the target language. The subjects also showed great agreement with the ideas of the modern researchers that translation can be used as a technique for teaching a language but with some reservations in order to avoid the overuse of translation that hinders communication with the target language. At the end of his study the researcher suggests that other similar studies are needed in order to confirm the controlled use of translation in other parts of Libya and other similar Arab Communities.

In his study of the influences of first language on the target language Krashen (2002: 64) said that the impact of the first language is greater on the target language in cases of complicated word orders and cases of one to one translation. In this latter case the learners' word order may intervene such as the example mentioned in English as "another my friend" instead of "another friend of mine". It is also common among Arab learners to use an objective pronoun after a relative pronoun as in "The man whom I met him…" instead of "The man whom I met…" Krashen also says that the influences of first language on the target language are expected to be greater whenever the language input is from the teacher more than that from the peer learners.

In another study by Samarardali and Ismael (2017: 64) in Jordan the researchers designed a questionnaire that was formulated to tackle three areas of the use of translation in the teaching of the target language these areas include the frequency of the use of translation, the efficiency of using translation and the areas of the target language where translation is used. The main findings of this study indicate that translation is useful in teaching a target language, but the overuse of translation is not recommended in order to help learners think in the target language and use it. translation should be the last resort and it can be used in areas of explaining new lexical items, idiomatic and cultural expressions, explanation of grammatical structures, checking understanding of reading and listening passages, and checking errors of first language interference. At the end of their study the researchers suggested that teachers should not use translation intensively in order to avoid forgetting the central semantic and pragmatic features of the target language. Then they suggested that it is important that teachers should encourage learners to infer meanings of the target language through the target language itself. Translation is only recommended in cases where translation aids and facilitates understanding without greater interference within the target language functions. Translation is also recommended in cases of a common L1 uses of both teachers and learners, or when the L2 instances of language can be easily understood by the L1 speakers such as in cases of abstract words or content words that can be explained by what is called ostensive definitions (names of materials, fruit, etc.)

Discussion, Results, Conclusion and Recommendations

Out of all the discussed, commented and analyzed related general theoretical frame work, observations and literature, we come to have a narrowed picture of the whole topic of the positive and negative aspects of the use of translation as a teaching technique in English language classrooms. First of all we feel that the overall content let us take the same intermediate stand of translation because there are strong evidences to go within this direction of matters, that is to say the goals justify the means. Below, we are going to elaborate these justifications that we reach at in order to conclude with the findings, suggestions and recommendation of this present study for further future studies.

With regard to the positive aspects of the use of translation as one of the techniques of teaching English as a foreign language, we can say that translation can be a post but not a pre activity; that is to say the explanation of the whole lesson should be based on the use of the target language so as to give more chances for communicative activities related to the authentic real use of the target language. Afterwards some post activities can be designed to practice translation of some teaching activities for further practices and a good understanding of what is taught. These kinds of activities are recommended as post activities because learners may start to form some kind of understanding of the target language tasks in their native language, if a teacher comes to use translation, he may motivate the learners when their anticipated concepts about the taught language come to be true.

Moreover, and in cases of abstract concepts or other concepts for which there might be a general agreement about their concepts in the target and first language such as names of materials, fruit, types of food, etc. the use of translation may not be harmful because the meaning will be grasped without further complications. Such expressions or lexical items can be classified as positive or real cognates, or there is no any complication about their derived conception. On this very real problem of authenticity Trudgill (1984: 193) says that translation may affect the 'authenticity' of the translated text.

The most plausible, and agreed upon positive aspect of using translation in language teaching may be that of using translation at one hand and following it at the other hand with a quick use of the target language in a real communicative stretch of speech, and which is given a methodological term 'juxtaposition' is seemingly positive from a superficial perspective. However, 'juxtaposition' should be a post activity after explaining the intended language item within a context of the target language as it has been stated at the beginning of this discussion of the findings for the sake of giving the learners a motivating sense of learning.

Within the intermediate aspects of using translation in teaching English language as the target language, we can begin with juxtaposition itself, but with the modification that is mentioned in the above paragraph, that is to say translation can be used but with some precautions or reservations to avoid any negative consequences that may hinder the communicative use of the target language. To avoid these deficiencies the target language explanations should be given priorities then any translation activities can be taken later as more confirmations for understanding.

The negative aspects of the use of translation in the teaching of languages in general, and the teaching of English language in particular may all be derived from the fact that any language system is a specialized system of codes and conventions which are confined to that language system in particular and will never be equated with all the other languages codes and conventions. For Davies and Elder (2004: 61) "Full equivalents may need mere listing, while partial and surrogate equivalents require further explanation or exemplification to ensure sense identification and discrimination". Moreover, within the same language system, and as a result of the creativity of human language, we can say that any language expression or structure is a unique language entity that is never repeated once again due to the surrounding differences of the contextual factors. Depending on this introduction we can say that, generally speaking, translation should be avoided as far as we can because it lowers the chances of exposing the learners to the communicative activities in the target language and as such it hinders learners' target language communicative competence. Moreover, the intensive use of translation will expose the learners to the development of false cognates that will result in the wrong uses of the target language expressions or constructions.

Summary of findings

Out of the discussion above the following points will be the most important findings of this study:

1. Translation can positively be used as post activities in teaching English to grant more learners' motivation.
2. There are strong evidences that translation of abstract language units and names of materials will never lead to harmful uses of cognates or expressions.

3. For the avoidance of deficiencies of using the target language communicatively explanations in the target language, including juxtaposition, should precede any translation activities.
4. Using translation as a teaching technique for English language should not be overused to avoid the occurrence of false cognates.
5. The excessive use of translation in ELT classes hinders communicative target language competence.

Suggestions and Recommendations for Further Studies

In the light of the findings of this study the following suggestions and recommendation will help this present study be replicated in further future studies:

1. Positivity and Negativity of Using Translation in Multilingual Language Settings.
2. Positivity and Negativity of Using Translation in Diaglossic Contexts.
3. Incorporation of Positive Perspectives of Translation in Syllabus Designing and Setting.

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